

# Suburban and urban housing in the twentieth century

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## Abstract

Ireland experienced dramatic political, social and economic change in the twentieth century, of which the shift from a majority rural to a majority urban population was one of the most notable. These changes are reflected in the nature and form of the built environment. In this essay, the evolution of urban and suburban housing during Ireland's first urban century is considered. Existing patterns of unplanned middle-class suburban expansion were supplemented, from the 1920s, by a programme of planned working-class suburbanization. State intervention thus impacted on the location and form of new housing estates, while layouts owed much to the early British town-planning movement. High levels of owner-occupation in Ireland, the combined result of government policy and individual preference, were also reflected in a preference for particular housing forms. The predominance of the standardised three- or four-bedroom, semi-detached or detached house, was not challenged until the 1990s when there was a surge in apartment provision, largely driven by tax incentives. Changing norms in terms of housing size, facilities and design were shaped by the standards adopted by government and local authorities, as well as to the pressures of the speculative building process.

## Introduction and context

The place called home, in an Irish context, changed little in the course of the twentieth century, and yet it also changed dramatically. This apparent contradiction can be explained by the fact that, while the typical home at the beginning of the twenty-first century remains the single-family detached or semi-detached dwelling, its location and context are now rather different. The number of people living in each family home is now smaller, as household size has fallen, and fragmentation has occurred in the typical definition of 'family' (see Table 1). As Table 1 illustrates, the average household size has been in decline throughout the twentieth century, apart from a small degree of fluctuation in the 1960s. The overall average household size for the state has fallen from 4.48 persons per private household in 1926 (the first year for which data are available for the newly formed state) to 2.95 persons per private household in 2002. Since the 1980s, average household size in urban areas has been somewhat lower than that for rural areas. While the norm of a two-storey three- or four-bedroom house has proved enduring, the range of facilities and level of comfort has improved considerably since the early twentieth century, when the availability of hot and cold running

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TABLE 1—Average number of persons per private household in permanent housing units in the aggregate town and aggregate rural areas of the state, selected census years between 1926 and 2002.

Year	1926	1936	1946	1961	1966	1971	1981	1991	2002
Aggregate rural area	4.55	4.33	4.16	3.96	3.95	3.89	3.72	3.46	3.09
Aggregate town area	4.32	4.28	4.15	3.99	4.07	3.98	3.64	3.26	2.86
Total for the 26 counties	4.48	4.31	4.16	3.97	4.01	3.94	3.68	3.34	2.95

Source: census data, 1926–2002.

water was considered to be a major selling point in a new home. Moreover, the house is now most likely to be located in a suburban estate at the edge of a town or city, with its residents highly dependent on the car to conduct their everyday affairs. During the course of Ireland’s first urban century, legislation relating to housing and social policy played a huge role in determining the nature, location, size and tenure of housing units across the country. Housing provided by local authorities was very important, not only because these authorities were responsible for nearly 300,000 homes since the foundation of the state, of which over 200,000 were sold to tenants,<sup>1</sup> but also because of the impact which the layout and design of local-authority schemes has had on private speculative housing. To understand the evolution of the form, content and design of Irish housing over the course of the twentieth century, it is necessary to explore some of the underlying conditions, and particularly to examine the role played by government policy in promoting particular forms of tenure and housing type.

Ireland’s urban and suburban housing from 1900 to 1914

How can the typical urban or suburban home at the turn of the twentieth century in Ireland be characterized? The census returns provide the basic details focused on numerical indicators, while newspaper advertisements help to flesh out the typical characteristics of residences made available for sale or rent. The legislation which governed housing at the time is also helpful in indicating the key concerns of the period.

Ireland’s housing stock remained virtually static during the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> In 1901 there were 1,384,929 people living in ‘civic areas’ on the island of Ireland. This includes all towns with at least 2,000 inhabitants, of which there were 107.<sup>3</sup> Housing information collected by census enumerators in both 1901 and 1911 reflects the preoccupations of the time,<sup>4</sup> with an emphasis on housing conditions and density of occupation. Each house was classified according to its overall state,

<sup>1</sup> In 1991 former local-authority houses accounted for a quarter of all owner-occupied houses in the country.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Power, *Hovels to high rise* (London, 1993), 327. Whereas other European countries had seen considerable urban house-building by private landlords and employers, there was relatively little new private-building in southern Irish towns and cities during the nineteenth century. The more industrialised north-east of the island was an exception.

<sup>3</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1911: general report* (London, 1913), xx.

<sup>4</sup> The details recorded for each house included the number of windows, type of roof and number of rooms occupied by each family. The number of out-offices and farm-buildings

from the better ‘first class’ accommodation to the ‘third class’ slums (see Table 2). The information gathered was analysed to show the level of overcrowding, measured in terms of persons per room, and the serious problem of poor housing conditions which pertained nationwide. The 1901 census shows that almost three-quarters of the population lived in rural areas. In relative terms, the proportion of better quality housing (i.e. first- and second-class houses) was higher in urban than in rural locations, although in absolute terms there were more such houses in rural areas (see Fig. 1).

## Private housing before 1914

Most homes in 1901 were rented rather than owned outright, regardless of the social position of their residents, while speculative building was the most important component of housing supply. In the United Kingdom, some 90% of houses were rented and, while there are no specific data available for Ireland, it is likely that the proportion was similar. Building costs were relatively low prior to the First World War, and there was a steady demand from investors who sought the security of ‘bricks and mortar’. Landowners typically provided relatively small parcels for house-building either directly to builders or sometimes to land developers.<sup>5</sup> Construction was generally carried out by small-scale speculators, who were either house-builders or minor capitalists who employed the builders. Apart from basic sanitary and building controls, there were no regulations governing the way in which the land in newly developed areas was laid out. As a result, suburban growth can appear uncoordinated, as individual speculators acquired and developed small plots without reference to neighbouring developments. New roads often followed the line of older farm lane-ways, while former field boundaries and landownership patterns were frequently preserved in the divisions between new housing plots.

Small number of houses were generally built and sold off to investors before the next batch was completed.<sup>6</sup> This led to a patchwork effect in the evolving suburbs, as many different builders worked within a relatively small area, using slightly different designs and layouts, so that one street might comprise a series of individually named terraces of different house styles. Nevertheless, these early twentieth-century streets of red-brick homes tended to have an overall similarity. Given the precarious nature of the business, speculators tended to ‘play safe’ and were generally conservative in terms of design and layout.

The typical purchaser for the pre-First World War speculatively built house was an investor rather than an owner-occupier. This is evident from contemporary property advertisements which stressed ease of letting. Desirable residences advertised in the *Irish Times* generally featured a servant’s room and pantries, while the absence of a basement was identified as a benefit of a modern home. References

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attached to each household was also given. Census of Ireland, 1901: preliminary report, with abstracts of the enumerators, summaries, &c. BPP 1901 XC [Cd.613] (Dublin, 1902). 4.

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed case study, see Ruth McManus, ‘The growth of Drumcondra 1875–1940’, in James Kelly (ed.), *St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, 1875–2000: a history* (Dublin, 2006), 41–66.

<sup>6</sup> The process has been described in Ruth McManus, *Dublin 1910–1940: shaping the city and suburbs* (Dublin, 2002) and, for England, by A.A. Jackson, *Semi-detached London* (London, 1973).

TABLE 2—Inhabited houses in each class in urban and rural areas, 1901.

	<i>First class</i>	<i>Second class</i>	<i>Third class</i>	<i>Fourth class</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% of housing stock</i>
Civic areas	36,525 (15.8%)	171,792 (74.3%)	22,268 (9.6%)	527 (0.2%)	231,112	26.9
Rural areas	38,700 (6.2%)	349,662 (55.8%)	229,342 (36.6%)	9,346 (1.5%)	627,050	73.1

Source: census data, 1901.

to bright rooms with bay windows, fresh air and healthy aspects were common for suburban dwellings. Typically, the larger the house was, the grander was its interior decoration. Moreover, Edwardian homes were generally brighter and more airy than their Victorian predecessors, with fewer, larger rooms. Decorative detail became simpler as the ornate, cluttered, dark and labour-intensive interiors of the better Victorian homes gave way to clean, light spaces, free of bric-à-brac (Pl. I).<sup>7</sup>

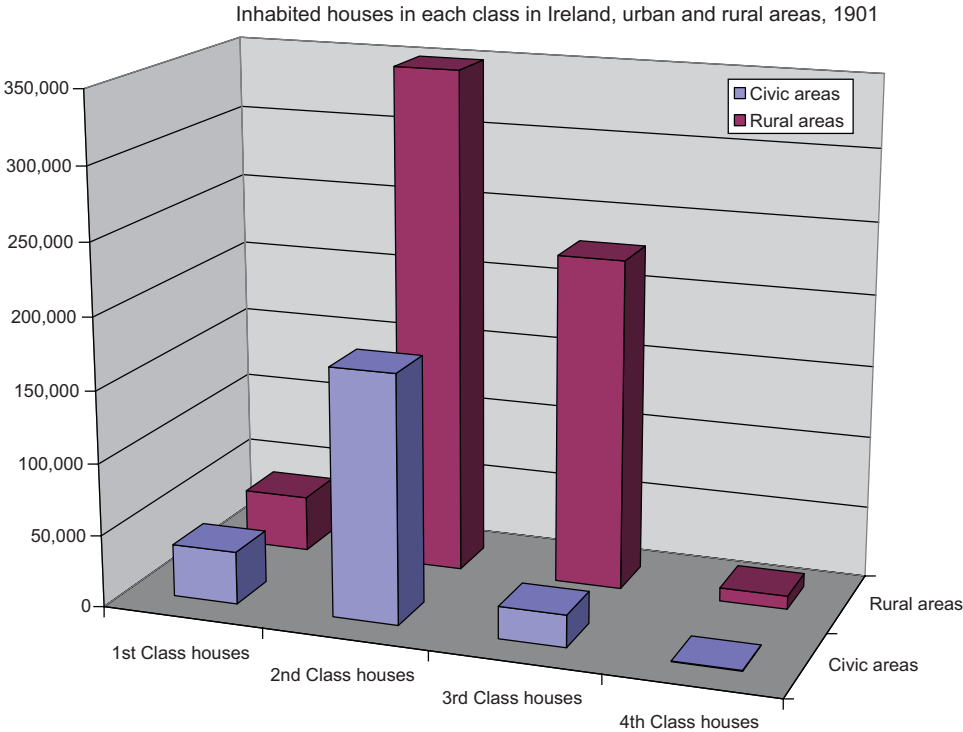


FIG. 1—Inhabited houses in each class in Ireland, urban and rural areas, 1901.

<sup>7</sup> Some indication of the style of house interiors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be ascertained from the work of John Burnett, *A social history of housing 1815–1970* (London, 1980); Judith Flanders, *The Victorian house: domestic life from childbirth to deathbed* (London, 2003); Helen Long, *The Edwardian house* (Manchester, 1993) and Yvonne Bell, *The Edwardian home* (Princes Risborough, 2005).

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**HOUSES AND LANDS FOR SALE.**

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**H**OUSES built with very best materials, seven apartments, all modern improvements, only £350 each; open for the inspection of architects and others who understand what well-built houses are; the builder is a single practical man, having a thorough knowledge of the business, which enables him to sell so very cheap; at Cabra Park, St. Peter's road, Cabra; penny tram from College green. — C. Coates. 8 76

**H**OLLYBANK road, Drumcondra — For Sale, 7 Houses, substantially built; perfect sanitation; hot baths; let at £40 each; price £400 each.—D. Daly Hillsboro, Drumcondra. 4 1

**H**AROLD'S Cross -- For Sale, together or separately, three modern Houses; head rent £6; lease 400 years; price £460 each; or would be Let; rent £44, free. Apply Battersby, 39 Westmoreland street. 4 2

**M**ELROSE avenue, Fairview—Attractive Houses for Sale bay windows, seven apartments, bath hot, and cold throughout; electric bells, & c.; long lease; low head rent; £250 of purchase money can remain out at low interest, — Dawson and Company, Contractors, Montgomery Street. 26 14

**N**EW Small Houses, Ranelagh; all let; lowest, £35 each.—D 377, this office. 4 1

**O**NE or a pair of semi-detached Houses, almost completed. for Sale or would Let; 2 reception, 5 bedrooms, & c.; anyone wanting well-built house of special design; convenient position. North side. Apply D 491, this office, 4 1

**O**VOCA road—Two best Houses for immediate Sale; great bargain. Sole agent, Wren, 9 Bachelor's Walk. 4 2

**S**ELL, three first-class Houses, Rathmines, penny tram, 10 apartments, let at £50 each, possession of one; sanitary certificate; cost £1,600, sell for £1,560; built superior manner.—D 355, this office. 4 1

**S**OUTH Circular road, tram line — First-class Residence; moderate rent; price £500. — Messrs. Towers, 63 Middle Abbey street. 4 1

**S**UBURBAN Houses — At our next Property Sale, 2 St. Bridget's road, second house from Whitworth road on right side, one of the best houses in district; let at £35; also 22 St. Patrick's road, really choice investment; nominal ground rent; let at £34; no better investment for small capitalist. 4 2

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PL. I—Extract from the *Irish Times* Houses and Lands for Sale advertisements, 5 March 1901. Courtesy of the *Irish Times*.

By present-day standards, the facilities in most homes at the start of the twentieth century were basic. Running water was generally provided in new houses, although the indoor lavatory was a feature only of houses inhabited by the better off; the separate toilet in an outhouse remained the norm. Water was supplied to the scullery sink, while a galvanised-steel bath with heated water from the range was used for bathing. Those living in older accommodation were generally required to have recourse to a local water-pump to obtain water. Gradually more affluent properties secured their own bathrooms. In urban areas, gas or even electricity was used for lighting, supplemented by oil lamps and candles. A small, utilitarian kitchen was typical. Either an open fire or enclosed cast-iron range was used for cooking as well as heating the kitchen area, while open coal or turf fires were used in other parts of the house. Usually an attractive, decorative fire-place was located in the parlour, while the bedrooms had small cast iron fire-places. Solid fuel was stored in an outhouse or, in more central areas and, in older houses, in cellars accessed from the street by coal-holes.

Funds for private house purchase were made available by building societies, banks and insurance companies. A further stimulus was provided by the Small Dwellings Acquisition Act, 1899, which enabled local authorities to advance loans for the purchase of existing houses (of a certain class/price range). This legislation was to prove significant in the shifting pattern of housing tenure in Ireland over the course of the century that followed its introduction.

## Conquering the slums before 1914

Slum conditions were a feature of all of Ireland's cities and towns at the turn of the twentieth century; indeed urban decay was a contributory factor in the decision of many better-off urban-dwellers to remove themselves to the healthier and more socially distinct suburbs. Nowhere was this trend more evident than in Dublin, the slums of which were frequently compared to those of Calcutta,<sup>8</sup> and where the emergence of independently governed suburbs created financial difficulties for the city authorities. It has also been suggested that housing provision was twentieth-century Cork's greatest problem.<sup>9</sup> From the start of

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<sup>8</sup> From 1877 the *Irish Times* regularly published statistics based on the registrar general's weekly returns, showing Dublin's mortality rate in comparison to UK and selected foreign cities, including Calcutta. Specific reference was made in 1901 to 'the fact that the vital statistics of Calcutta during an epidemic of the dreaded bubonic plague compare favourably with those of Dublin at the present moment' ('Editorial', *Irish Times*, 8 March 1901, 4). In 1915 James Connolly drew on the statistics presented by Dublin's medical officer of health, Sir Charles Cameron, to deplore the high mortality in the city, suggesting that 'the thoughtful reader cannot but be impressed and saddened by the comparison drawn in the above extract between Dublin and such cities as Moscow and Calcutta', which he regarded as 'so much of a humiliation that it should fire every Irishman and woman with a fierce eagerness to remove such a stigma' (James Connolly, *Labour in Ireland: II the re-conquest of Ireland* (Dublin, 1917), 254–5).

<sup>9</sup> Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin slums 1800–1925* (Dublin, 1998); Michael Gough, 'Socio-economic conditions and the genesis of planning in Cork', in M.J. Bannon (ed.), *The emergence of Irish planning* (Dublin, 1985), 307–62.



the century, state housing policy focused on improving sanitary conditions and eliminating overcrowding, rather than on actively creating a good environment in which to live. Ireland's urban areas—especially Dublin—were noted for the high density of persons per room, with the single-room tenements of the capital being singled out in numerous reports for particular attention. Indeed, well over one-third of all tenements in Dublin County Borough were of one room only (see Table 3).<sup>10</sup>

With the increasing recognition of the plight of slum-dwellers during the nineteenth century, the first legislation concerning the housing of the working classes was introduced in the 1860s. The Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890, was the foundation statute of the urban housing code, empowering local authorities to provide dwellings, with a provision to sell them if they proved too burdensome on the ratepayers.<sup>11</sup> It was not until 1908 that the first subsidy towards urban housing was provided under the Housing of the Working Classes (Ireland) Act, better known as the Clancy Act. Ireland's first large public housing programmes were associated with late nineteenth-century land reform, including the provision by rural local authorities of almost 50,000 new cottages for landless labourers and by the Congested Districts Board of thousands more. Thus, at the start of the twentieth century, Ireland's urban local authorities were set to begin catching up with the housing achievements of their rural counterparts.<sup>12</sup>

Dublin Corporation erected some flats in the inner city at high density, but they were costly to build and maintain, and proved both unpopular with tenants and difficult to manage.<sup>13</sup> Instead, high density 'cottage estates' were built on central infill or slum clearance sites, with both single-storey and two-storey houses, which opened directly onto the street and had a paved back yard. They were more sanitary than the slums, but remained similar in form and layout to speculatively built working-class housing of the era. Dublin Corporation built its first suburban cottage estate at Clontarf in 1905, at the same time that Cork Corporation constructed its first three green-field schemes.<sup>14</sup> While the suburban location of the new housing was novel, the design of all of these schemes was familiar, comprising terraced housing with a small back yard and without gardens.

The majority of the urban working classes continued to live in makeshift homes, overcrowded cottages or, in the case of Dublin, in the decaying former homes of the wealthy which were subdivided as tenements and let on a room-by-

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<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the earliest housing provided by local authorities to replace the worst tenements had limited space provisions, which resulted in much criticism of these schemes.

<sup>11</sup> P.J. Meghen, *Housing in Ireland* (Dublin, 1965); see also the chapter by Frank Cullen in this volume.

<sup>12</sup> F.H.A. Aalen, 'The rehousing of rural labourers in Ireland under the Labourers (Ireland) Acts, 1883–1919', *Journal of Historical Geography* 12 (1986), 287–306; F.H.A. Aalen, 'Public housing in Ireland, 1880–1921', *Planning Perspectives* 2(2) (1987), 175–93.

<sup>13</sup> Mary E. Daly, 'Housing conditions and the genesis of housing reform in Dublin, 1880–1920', in Bannon (ed.) *The emergence of Irish planning*, 77–130.

<sup>14</sup> Gough, 'Socio-economic conditions and the genesis of planning in Cork', 314.

TABLE 3—Characteristics of urban tenements, 1901.

	<i>Total tenements</i>	<i>Tenements of less than five rooms</i>	<i>Tenements of less than five rooms as a % of the total</i>	<i>One-room tenements</i>	<i>One-room tenements as a % of all tenements</i>
Dublin County Borough	59,263	46,822	79	21,747	36.7
Belfast County Borough	69,981	32,008	45.7	697	1.0
Cork County Borough	15,255	10,604	69.5	1,620	10.6
Limerick County Borough	7,378	5,564	75.4	1,166	15.8
Waterford County Borough	5,052	3,509	69.5	368	7.3
Londonderry County Borough	7,392	4,537	61.4	529	7.2
Galway Town	2,526	1,680	66.5	268	10.6

Source: census data, 1901.

room basis.<sup>15</sup> Given this context, new ideas of town-planning were identified as a means of addressing the problems of urban housing, environmental decay and social deprivation.<sup>16</sup>

## Housing from 1914 to the 1940s

House construction throughout Ireland was impeded by the First World War (1914–18), which brought with it associated shortages of building materials and labour, and increased building costs. The unstable political situation in Ireland until the early 1920s led to a prolonged delay in the resumption of house construction and, inevitably, to a housing shortage. This fact was influential in shaping housing policy in the 1920s, when the state introduced a series of measures to promote house-building. Even before the resumption of building, the immediate post-war period saw some important developments in thinking which shaped the future direction of housing layout, design and standards in Ireland.

Britain's post-war building programme adopted minimum standards and 'garden suburb' layouts, promoted by the Tudor Walters report<sup>17</sup> and associated *Housing manual*.<sup>18</sup> Both aesthetic and practical considerations were to be taken into

<sup>15</sup> Some philanthropic housing was provided during this era. The Dublin Artisans Dwellings Company (founded in 1876) and the Guinness (later Iveagh) Trust (founded in 1890) catered for the better-off artisans and securely employed workers. The relatively higher rents which were payable can help to explain the far better quality of design and services afforded to those fortunate enough to avail of this housing. The Iveagh Trust did not just provide housing but, at its largest scheme, close to St Patrick's Cathedral, it developed a broader range of facilities, including a gym and leisure facilities in a recreation hall, as well as providing adult education. See F.H.A. Aalen, *The Iveagh Trust* (Dublin, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> M.J. Bannon, 'Introduction', in Bannon (ed.), *The emergence of Irish planning*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> The report of a committee, chaired by Sir John Tudor Walters, MP, which had inquired into working-class housing provision in Britain in anticipation of a post-war shortage, gave an important boost to town-planning. It had also studied construction and design standards.

<sup>18</sup> Local Government Board, *Manual on the preparation of state-aided housing schemes* (London, 1919).



account in the layout of estates, with a stress on the preservation of existing trees and shrubs, and the creation of pleasant vistas. This was a radical departure from the previous utilitarian approach to layout and design, especially for public housing. These innovations had a knock-on effect in Ireland, where one of the most fundamental changes was the adoption of an 'appropriate' housing density of 12 houses to the acre (c. 30 per hectare) in suburban locations, resulting in low-density layout using *culs-de-sac* for full site development, rather than a rigid grid. This was to become the norm for speculative builders and local authorities alike. Furthermore, not less than 10% of the gross housing area was reserved for open spaces and play-grounds.

Like Britain's *Housing manual*, the rather smaller 1919 *Housing of the working classes in Ireland* report provided 'plans for the lay-out of typical sites and for various types of houses'. Notably, a density of not more than ten houses to the acre (c. 25 per hectare) was specified. Wider house frontages avoided 'tunnel back' rear projections so that most rooms received natural sunlight. The normal house was to have two living-rooms and three bedrooms, all of stated minimum sizes. Privacy was considered important, so there were no shared facilities and fixed baths were considered essential. Parlours were provided in some, though not all, houses. Most Irish urban local authorities adopted the four- or five-roomed house as standard during the 1920s. The red-brick terraced local-authority houses typical of the pre-First World War schemes were replaced by larger houses of more varied designs. The advantages of the adoption of new standards in construction quality, site design and layout were undoubted. As in Britain, private developers were obliged to copy the high minimum standards utilised in local-authority housing, although the former remained more conservative in the layouts that they chose for their schemes. The outcome of this was the creation of a new form of suburbia. The impact on housing standards is indicated by a leading article in *The Irish Builder* in 1923,<sup>19</sup> which maintained that the standard of housing being enforced at the time was too high. In 1925 the Free State's Ministry of Local Government issued a further five-volume series of model housing plans.<sup>20</sup> As the designs were adopted, they gradually changed the face of housing across the country (see Fig. 2).

The early years of the Irish Free State witnessed a particularly strong focus on the provision of quality suburban dwellings for all members of society. One of the first acts of the provisional government in 1922 was to set aside £1 million for urban housing, to encourage building. Housing legislation of 1924 and 1925 gave a stimulus to both private and public building, and made grants available to private individuals and to other bodies, thereby encouraging owner-occupation. Local authorities that built housing at this time generally sold the houses either by tenant purchase or for cash, because of the costs involved. By then, the garden suburb ideal of 10 to 12 houses to the acre, the use of *culs-de-sac*, the provision of gardens front and rear and, where possible, variation in house design, was the preferred option. Inevitably, the prefer-

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<sup>19</sup> *The Irish Builder and Engineer*, March 1923.

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Local Government, 'House designs prescribed by the minister for local government under the Housing Act, 1924' (Dublin, 1925).

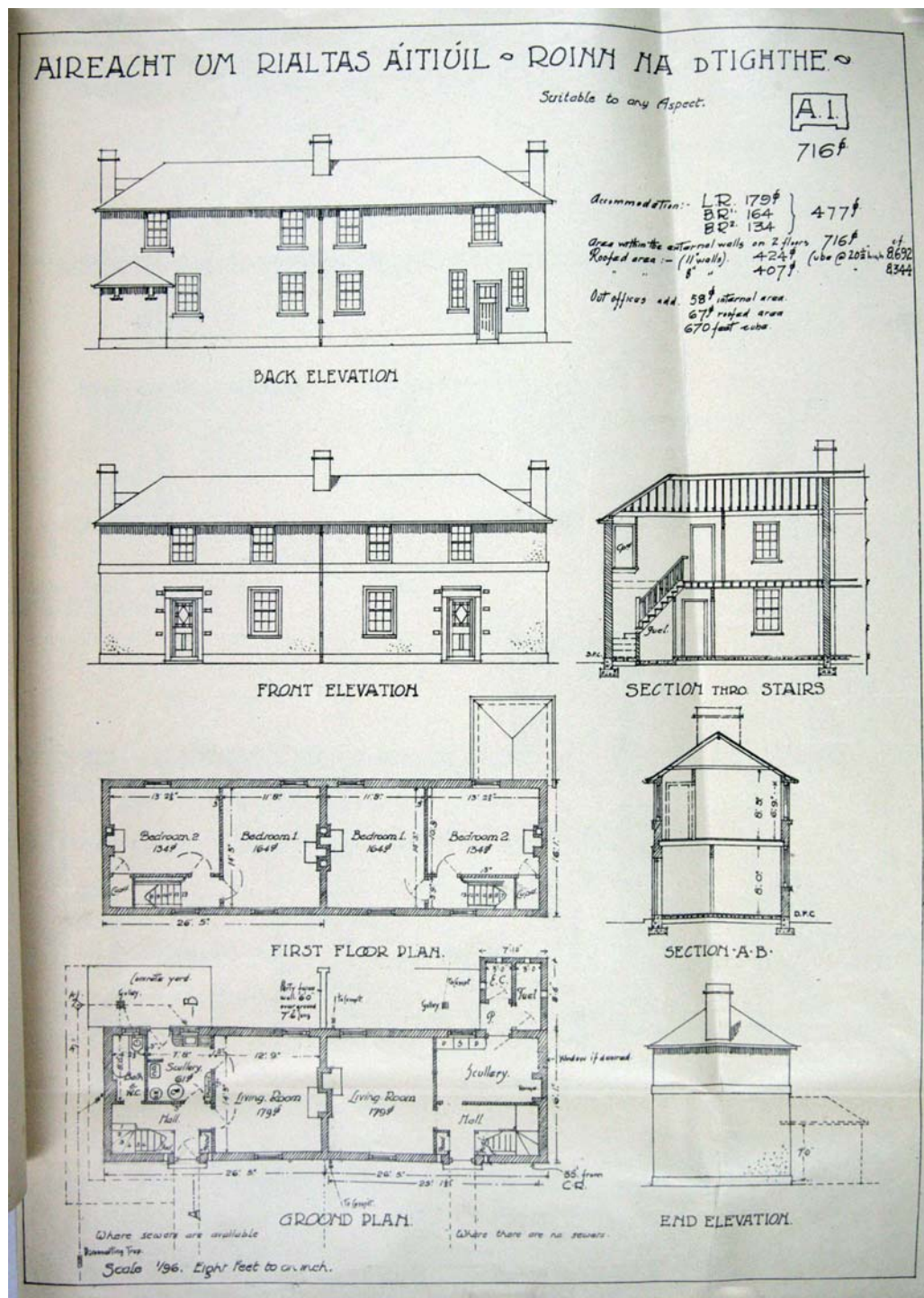


FIG. 2—Example of model housing plans provided by the Housing Section, Department of Local Government, in the early years of the Irish Free State. After housing plan in *House designs prescribed by the minister for local government under the Housing Act, 1924* (5 vols, Dublin, 1925), book A.

ence for low densities and high standards concentrated development in suburban areas; it limited the possible scale of building, given the costs, and it neglected the majority of the poorly housed population who were and remained in the central urban areas.

For private speculative houses in the 1920s, advertisements emphasized the use of solid materials such as brick and a continuance of pre-war standards. By the 1930s most suburban houses were compact, with fewer rooms (as maids' rooms, pantries and the like were gradually dispensed with). The semi-detached design was favoured in urban areas throughout the country. New semi-detached residences on Church Avenue, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, advertised in 1929 included two reception rooms, five bedrooms, a kitchen, scullery, pantry and garage, with 'up-to-date sanitation' including 2 W.C.s and hot and cold water, as well as a plot of ground to the front and a garden at the rear.<sup>21</sup> This description was typical of the standard semi-detached home, which was now favoured, and usually included two reception rooms—sometimes separated by sliding doors—a kitchen and scullery on the ground-floor, with three, or occasionally four, bedrooms, a bathroom and a separate W.C. above. Advertisements frequently referred to labour-saving designs, as in the 1932 advertisement for a house in Newcastle, Galway, which boasted of electric light and built-in presses 'to save work'.<sup>22</sup> While more affluent households availed of the new owner-occupied housing encouraged by government building grants and the financial facilities afforded by the Small Dwellings Acquisition Act, private-rented housing was relatively ignored during this phase of development.

The 1920s saw the Free State tackle housing conditions through legislation, grants and subsidies. The outcome was the creation of new high-quality suburban housing for a limited number of people. However, before the end of the decade there was a change in policy as it was recognised that a serious urban slum problem remained. The 1930s brought slum clearance on a large scale. Between 1932 and 1942 over 11,000 condemned houses were demolished both privately and by local authorities across the country.<sup>23</sup> While suburban housing was still erected in large, low-density estates, the specifications were now less generous,<sup>24</sup> and the rents often beyond the means of families that had been rehoused due to slum clearances. In Dublin, the poorest families were often accommodated in new complexes in central areas. Elsewhere, the suburban housing density of 13 to 28 per acre (c. 32 to 69 houses per hectare) was well established. For example, Galway City's St Finbarr's

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<sup>21</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 23 March 1929, 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Connacht Sentinel*, 1 January 1935, 1. Two newly built two-storey dwellings on College Road were sold in 1936 with sitting room, kitchen, scullery, bathroom, W.C., three bedrooms and yard (*Connacht Sentinel*, 25 February 1936, 1). In 1937 a newly built house at Water Lane, Galway, boasted of a good vegetable garden in addition to the expected five rooms, electric light, water and sewerage (*Connacht Sentinel*, 24 August 1937, 1).

<sup>23</sup> See the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH) website, [www.icsh.ie/eng/housing\\_in\\_ireland](http://www.icsh.ie/eng/housing_in_ireland) (last accessed 3 February 2011).

<sup>24</sup> The houses built in the 1930s by Dublin Corporation were relatively small. A 1930s four-roomed cottage with three bedrooms and a living-room was just 565ft<sup>2</sup> (c. 52m<sup>2</sup>).

Terrace scheme in Bohermore included small houses laid out in the characteristic curved streets and set-back terraces of the Irish local-authority garden suburb.<sup>25</sup>

Another aspect of the housing drive during this period was the promotion of public utility societies, similar to Britain's co-partnership housing societies, whose objectives included the erection and/or reconstruction of working-class housing. Public utility societies received preferential grants over private speculators, while local authorities, seeing the benefits of supplementing their own housing provision, offered generous rates remission and made serviced sites available to such societies at the edges of their schemes in 'reserved areas', as for example, at Marino, Drumcondra and Kimmage in Dublin, and Turner's Cross in Cork. Most public utility societies provided for the lower-middle classes, just above the local authority remit, offering tenant purchase facilities. Their intermediate position between local authority and private housing was reflected in floor area and architecture; these houses often had a similar style to neighbouring local-authority dwellings but with extra features such as bay windows. Almost 86% of all housing provided by public utility societies to 1929 was erected in the greater Dublin area. The balance shifted after 1932, when public utility societies were particularly effective in providing rural housing in typical vernacular style.<sup>26</sup>

### The position at mid-century

Despite the efforts at slum clearance pursued during the 1930s, there was still a great need for improved working-class housing at the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>27</sup> Inevitably there was a decline in construction during the war years and in the immediate post-war period, due to shortages of labour, materials and equipment. The housing problem, therefore, was even more acute at the end of the war, as was highlighted by the findings of the 1946 census. Of 662,000 private dwellings in the country, only 15% had a fixed bath, while just 23% had an indoor lavatory.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, only one in six dwellings in Ireland had all the basic amenities (i.e. inside piped water, inside sanitary fittings and a fixed bath). Much of this reflected the legacy of older housing throughout the state. Nevertheless, modern conveniences were gradually making their mark. By 1951 it was claimed that refrigerators had been installed on a wide scale in many new Dublin housing estates.<sup>29</sup> However, smaller room sizes

<sup>25</sup> Galway City Council, *RAPID strategic plan: Galway City RAPID II* (Galway, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> Ruth McManus, 'Public utility societies, Dublin Corporation and the development of Dublin, 1920–1940', *Irish Geography* 29(1) (1996), 27–37; McManus, *Dublin 1910–1940*, 235–304; Ruth McManus, 'The role of public utility societies in Ireland, 1919–40', in Howard Clarke, Jacinta Prunty and Mark Hennessy (eds), *Surveying Ireland's past: multidisciplinary essays in honour of Anngret Simms* (Dublin, 2004), 613–38; Ruth McManus, *'Such happy harmony': early twentieth century co-operation to solve Dublin's housing problems* (Dublin, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> In Dublin, for example, it was estimated that a further 17,000 dwellings would be required to provide accommodation for all the families then in urgent need of rehousing, to be built over a ten-year period.

<sup>28</sup> Central Statistics Office (CSO), *Census of population of Ireland, 1946* (10 vols, Dublin, 1954), vol. 4, 214–15; also see the following chapter in this volume by Mary McCarthy.

<sup>29</sup> 'Lighthouses now have refrigerators', *Irish Times*, 7 August 1951, 6. A three-bedroomed house built at Calderwood Avenue, off Griffith Avenue, in 1947 included a built-in refrigerator and cupboards (*Irish Times*, 28 June 1952, 10).



and low ceilings were sometimes a cause for complaint, leading to suggestions that picture rails should be dispensed with.<sup>30</sup>

The 1946 census reveals a sharp divide between urban and rural areas with respect to the provision of sanitary and other amenities (see Table 4). Some 35.5% of all private dwellings in urban and suburban areas had a fixed bath, compared to just 3.9% of all rural dwellings. Just over two-thirds of households in the aggregate town areas had a piped water-supply that was not shared, whereas the corresponding figure for the aggregate rural areas was under 8%.<sup>31</sup> Over half of all urban households, but less than 7% of rural-dwellers, had an indoor lavatory. However, urban households were significantly more likely to share their sanitary facilities in common with another family or household than their rural counterparts.

The move towards owner-occupation as the dominant form of housing tenure in Ireland was a gradual process throughout the twentieth century. In 1922 owner-occupation stood at less than 10% with a more balanced spread between social-rented and private-rented tenure.<sup>32</sup> Historically, owner-occupation was at a much higher level in rural areas than in urban areas, due to the land reforms from the late nineteenth century and the tradition of private building of single family houses by the farming community. In 1946, when tenure data was first collected, less than one-quarter of dwellings in urban areas were owner-occupied (including tenant purchase schemes), whereas owner-occupation accounted for almost 70% of private dwellings in rural areas.<sup>33</sup> The trend towards owner-occupation accelerated in the second half of the century. By 1971 more than half of all homes (52.5%) in urban areas were owner-occupied, and within a decade that figure had risen to 65.6%, or almost two-thirds (see Table 5). The radical shift in tenure pattern was largely a result of government policy. In the immediate post-war period, the numbers in the public renting sector also rose, as more local-authority schemes were built in the 1950s and 1960s, and the proportion of private renting decreased significantly.<sup>34</sup>

Given the shortage of housing for all classes in the immediate post-war period, a new housing drive was required, and this encouraged a series of legislative measures to stimulate development.<sup>35</sup> The updated Small Dwellings Acquisitions

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<sup>30</sup> 'The bugbear of the modern house ... those low ceilings', *Irish Times*, 29 May 1953, 7.

<sup>31</sup> According to the 2002 census, less than 1% of homes in rural areas were without piped water.

<sup>32</sup> See the ICSH website, [www.icsh.ie](http://www.icsh.ie) (3 February 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Tony Fahey and Dorothy Watson, *An analysis of social housing need* (Dublin, 1995), 20, FN 3, from CSO, *Census of population 1946*.

<sup>34</sup> While tenure continued to shift, throughout the next decades, in favour of owner-occupation and away from private renting, the proportion of local-authority rentals changed. Although local authorities continued to build significant numbers of housing units up to 1980, the policy of sales to sitting tenants effectively led to a decline in the local authority share of the total.

<sup>35</sup> This began with the Housing (Amendment) Act, 1948, which was followed by two further acts in 1950 and 1952 which removed various procedural and financial obstacles, including increasing the maximum floor area of houses eligible for grants. Together the 1948, 1950 and 1952 acts stimulated the housing programme and made significant progress.

TABLE 4—Sanitary and other amenities in urban and rural housing for dwellings with water laid on, 1946.

	<i>Having fixed bath</i>	<i>Not having fixed bath</i>	<i>Piped supply used only by the household</i>	<i>Indoor lavatory</i>
Town areas	85,064 (39.6%)	129,815 (60.4%)	161,048 (67.3%)	123,856 (51.7%)
Rural areas	16,690 (51.2%)	15,931 (48.8%)	33,315 (7.9%)	29,139 (6.9%)

Source: *Census of the population, 1946* (Dublin, 1950), vol. IV, part II, tables 30, 31, 32, 45 and 46.

Act, 1948, also acted as a stimulus to private middle-class housing intended for purchase. The emerging planning movement was a feature of the ‘search for a new and better Ireland in the post-war era’.<sup>36</sup>

The new legislation promoted private-house construction, as at the Clonskeagh Castle Estate developed by G. & T. Crampton. Its requirements, combined with the

TABLE 5—Housing tenure in Ireland, 1946–2002.

	<i>1946</i>	<i>1961</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>2002</i>
<i>Total</i>						
% of private dwellings:						
Rented from local authority	42.7 <sup>1</sup>	18.4	15.5	12.5	9.7	6.9
Rented other than from local authority	—	17.2	13.3	10.1	8.0	11.1
Owner-occupied (including tenant purchase)	52.6	59.8	68.8	74.4	79.3	77.4
Other <sup>2</sup>	4.7	4.6	2.4	3.0	3.0	4.6
Total housing stock	662,654	676,402	726,363	896,054	1,019,723	1,279,617
<i>Aggregate town area</i>						
% of private dwellings:						
Rented from local authority	73.80	28.80	25.40	17.50	13.35	8.90
Rented other than from local authority	—	30.0	20.50	14.80	11.34	15.00
Owner-occupied (including tenant purchase)	23.20	38.0	52.50	65.60	73.15	71.5
Other	2.96	3.42	1.60	2.08	2.16	4.53
Urban housing stock	239,465	301,431	368,544	500,137	593,481	782,864
<i>Aggregate rural area</i>						
% of private dwellings:						
Rented from local authority	25.00	10.10	5.30	6.10	4.62	3.70
Rented other than from local authority	—	6.90	6.00	4.10	3.31	4.80
Owner-occupied (including tenant purchase)	69.30	77.40	85.50	85.60	87.81	86.70
Other	5.69	5.65	3.20	4.19	4.26	4.78
Rural housing stock	423,189	374,971	357,819	395,917	426,242	496,753

Source: census data, 1946, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2002.

<sup>1</sup> Occupancy data for 1946 did not specify whether the dwelling was rented from the local authority or not.

<sup>2</sup> In 1946 and 1961 the category ‘special terms, caretaker, etc.’ was used. This was altered in subsequent census years to ‘occupied free of rent’. From 1981 onwards an additional category ‘nature of occupancy not stated’ was also listed in the published census data. Both of these categories have been combined in the ‘other’ listing.

<sup>36</sup> Bannon, ‘Introduction’, 15.



availability of materials and evolving tastes, resulted in changes to the suburban houses begun in 1950 compared to earlier homes on the same estate. For example, the new houses used concrete roof tiles in lieu of slates as the former became more readily available and more cost-effective than the latter; cupboards were provided in bedrooms and kitchens, and wood-block flooring in the kitchens was omitted. The general form of construction remained as before, comprising cavity walls with facing brick front and gables and stock brick at the back. The price of the first five houses was fixed at not more than £2,575.<sup>37</sup>

The development of this housing estate was emblematic of the significant change wrought upon this area by 1953, as *The Irish Builder* observed.<sup>38</sup> Previously known for its 'scenic charm and tranquillity', 'all around was open countryside with nothing but ancient trees to obstruct a pleasing panorama of distant hills'. Building operations began gradually, before accelerating to a 'feverish rate', completely altering the character of the district:

Since then, in an area approximately two miles square, intersected by a main road, a third class road and a river, there have been added a fever hospital, a printing works and two factories [Browne and Nolan Ltd and Chivers & Sons (Ireland) Ltd] all in production, a third factory [Jefferson, Smurfit & Sons] nearing completion, and the beginnings of a Corporation housing scheme of considerable size ... So must the landscape of the English midlands have appeared at the dawn of the industrial revolution.

Similar changes were witnessed in all the major cities, as suburban development irreversibly altered the landscape, as at Cork's Dennehy's Cross, Douglas and Wilton.

After the war, long-delayed local-authority schemes also commenced; these included major flat-building projects such as the fifteen blocks at Rialto (Fatima Mansions), Dublin, which had been delayed by materials shortages. Such was the demand for labour on the schemes that a 'Come back to Erin' campaign was initiated to encourage skilled workmen to return from England.<sup>39</sup> The accelerated pace of house-building to which this attested continued through the 1950s. In 1951, for example, Dublin Corporation built 2,272 houses and flats, and had another 2,870 under construction. New large-scale local-authority suburbs were created around the city.<sup>40</sup> Forty-nine housing schemes were undertaken by Dublin Corporation over the decade with the result that, for most of the 1950s, local-authority housing accounted for at least half of all housing built in Dublin.<sup>41</sup> In Cork, the corporation completed

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<sup>37</sup> G. & T. Crampton Ltd, *Company minutes* (Dublin, 1950).

<sup>38</sup> 'Oriel's log', *The Irish Builder and Engineer* 95 (1953), 111.

<sup>39</sup> Construction at the time was extremely labour intensive. For example, at the Rutland Avenue scheme under way by 1945, with 500 houses under construction, there were 700 men employed.

<sup>40</sup> Including Ballyfermot, Finglas, Bluebell, Walkinstown, Milltown and Crumlin.

<sup>41</sup> In the period from the end of the Second World War to 1959 almost 45% of the 42,360 dwellings built in Dublin were constructed by the public sector. That trend continued during

an average of 330 houses per annum in the period 1950 to 1961.<sup>42</sup> Limerick's new estates at Ballynanty and Rathbane featured a variety of housing to cater for differing needs, set within informal layouts, retaining trees where possible (Pl. II).<sup>43</sup>

Local authorities helped to shape the expanding suburban environment not only by developing housing schemes which reflected 'garden suburb' norms in terms of site density and layout, but also by providing for a range of additional services in the new areas.<sup>44</sup> From the 1930s onwards, local authorities made sites available for small terraces of local shops, as well as for churches, schools, dispensaries and libraries. Factory sites were also set aside to provide employment in the locality.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the labour market provided by new housing estates was a draw for factories, which chose to locate near private housing areas, as at Santry, Dublin, where wireless sets were made by Bush (Ireland) Ltd from 1952.<sup>46</sup> The most important form of entertainment for suburban-dwellers was the cinema, and large picture-houses were a distinctive feature of the new areas. When Ballyfermot's Gala Cinema was completed in 1955, it had a seating capacity of 1,850 and was claimed to be the largest suburban cinema in Dublin.

From 'flat' to  
'apartment', the  
changing role of  
private multiple-  
occupancy housing

For the greater part of the twentieth century the provision of multiple-occupancy dwellings was a minor part of housing supply, and such demand as there was for this form of home was generally catered for by the subdivision of single-family dwellings. Flats were seen as the preserve of the working classes, and a continuation of the overcrowded tenements which had emerged in the previous century, and they were, for that reason, less popular than houses.<sup>47</sup> Most purpose-built flats, therefore, were provided by local authorities, generally in slum-clearance areas, and were a means of rehousing those displaced from condemned high-density dwellings.

Whereas by the start of the twentieth century, most metropolitan cities of Europe had developed a range of multiple-occupancy dwellings for the better

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the 1960s, when a swathe of the northern suburbs was developed, from Finglas and Ballymun to Coolock.

<sup>42</sup> Gough, 'Socio-economic conditions and the genesis of planning in Cork', 330.

<sup>43</sup> 'Limerick is proud of its new homes', *Irish Times*, 5 June 1952, 9.

<sup>44</sup> The scale of the new suburbs necessitated some attention to the mix of land-uses in each scheme. When plans for a new housing estate in the Raheny-Coolock district were approved by Dublin Corporation in January 1953, it was proposed that 204 acres would be acquired, of which approximately 75 acres would be used for municipal housing, 19 for industrial use and, of the remainder, a number of sites would be available for private building. There was provision for parks, playing fields, boys' and girls' schools, churches, and also a 'shopping centre'. The majority of the 896 houses planned, had four rooms (700), while 130 three-roomed houses and 66 five-roomed houses were also planned. The entire scheme was built between 1956 and 1958. By contrast, the 1,210 dwellings on a 212 acre site at Finglas West were built over a fourteen-year period from 1951.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Jeyes Sanitary Compounds Company site at Finglas (completed 1947).

<sup>46</sup> 'New works to make radio sets', *Irish Times*, 30 August 1951, 7.

<sup>47</sup> See McManus, *Dublin 1910-1940*, 129-33.



Pl. II—Dublin Corporation housing at Section 2G, Finglas, 1958–9. Courtesy of G. & T. Crampton Ltd Archive.

classes,<sup>48</sup> this was not the case in Ireland. Earlsfort Mansions (Pl. III, top left), the mansion flats built by James Pile ‘after the latest London style’<sup>49</sup> on the eve of the twentieth century at 21 and 22 Earlsfort Terrace, were a rarity. In 1905, *The Irish Builder* observed that these ornate mansion flats were ‘a solitary example of the residential flat in Dublin for people of means’.<sup>50</sup> Each of the ten flats included a hall, drawing-room, dining room, kitchen, scullery, servants’ room and three bedrooms. There were separate passenger and goods lifts, while the amenities provided to tenants included tennis-courts and stabling. Clearly, the mansion flat trend did not take off in Ireland, although the subdivision of older houses into flats and bed-sitting

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<sup>48</sup> Richard Dennis, “‘Room at the top’: early twentieth-century precursors of high-rise living in London”, in Lars Nilsson (ed.), *Urban Europe in comparative perspective (Eighth International Conference on Urban History, Stockholm 2006)*, Studies in Urban History Series (Stockholm, 2007).

<sup>49</sup> Classified ad. 111—no title, *Irish Times*, 1 June 1897, 8. Dennis discusses some of London’s luxury flat developments of this period. Richard Dennis “‘Babylonian Flats’ in Victorian and Edwardian London”, *The London Journal* 33(3) (2008), 233–47.

<sup>50</sup> *The Irish Builder*, 26 August 1905.

rooms (or bed-sitters) was a feature of housing for people of more modest means. A 1934 advertisement for exclusive flats at moderate rents in Glenageary House, Dublin, was unusual. The particulars specified that each self-contained flat had its own bathroom and W.C., and was equipped with both electricity and gas. The fact that garage accommodation was available 'if desired' is a good indication of the expected clientele.

The 1946 census reveals an interesting pattern in relation to flat-dwellings in the major urban areas (see Table 6). In the case of Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford, the large amount of poor-quality accommodation is indicated by the high proportion of one-roomed dwellings, low percentage of fixed baths and high percentage of shared sanitary facilities. Unsurprisingly, over 90% of the flat dwellings in each of these locations were rented. The data for Dún Laoghaire, however, suggests that flats in the borough catered to a different social class. Some 15% of flats were owned rather than rented, the vast majority of flats in the borough had more than one room, most had a fixed bath and relatively fewer shared sanitary facilities.

In the 1950s a pioneering project to erect purpose-built flats was undertaken by Irish Estates Ltd, a construction company linked to Irish Life Ltd, the assurance company which was to be the main investor. The Mespil Flats on Sussex Road erected between 1951/2 and 1959 comprised approximately 200 apartments in ten steel-reinforced blocks, each of which included in excess of 50 centrally heated self-contained flats, ranging in size from three bedrooms to bed-sitting room units, sometimes termed 'flatlets'. Facilities included a communal laundry with tumble-driers in the basement; roof gardens; a shared balcony on each floor; a service lift and central heating. Each flat had a separate hot-water heater, and the building also had an aerial for medium-wave radio, TV and VHF radio. A novel 'annunciator system of communication' (intercom) enabled residents to permit access to visitors without having to descend to the main door. The scheme was intended for 'tenants of middle incomes'<sup>51</sup> and accommodation was originally leased to tenants on an annual basis at rents ranging from £130 per annum for a bed-sitting room to £230 for a three-bedroom flat (Pl. III).<sup>52</sup>

The 1958 description of Mespil Flats as a reflection of 'the flat-habit ... one of the new trends'<sup>53</sup> was perhaps a little premature. In the decade following the commencement of the Mespil Flats, just eight further schemes were initiated.<sup>54</sup> The most unusual of these was the high-rise development, Ardoyne House, a twelve-storey luxury flat complex overlooking Herbert Park, erected by Sisk Ltd from 1964–6. By the late 1960s there was substantial growth in purpose-built flat development, all of which were for letting.

The construction of flats for sale to private owner-occupiers began to gather momentum in the early 1970s. It was noted at the time that major obstacles to flat-building, which had recently been removed, included the reluctance of lending insti-

<sup>51</sup> 'Mansion makes way for flats: ceilings saved for state', *Irish Times*, 29 June 1954, A5.

<sup>52</sup> Classified ad. 34—no title, *Irish Times*, 19 May 1954, 10.

<sup>53</sup> Caroline Mitchell, 'A flat with all mod. con.', *Irish Times*, 8 October 1958, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Jane A. Holdship and Desmond A. Gillmor, 'Private apartment development in Dublin', *Irish Geography* 9 (1976), 123–8.

TABLE 6—Number of flats or tenements in the county boroughs of Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford and the borough of Dun Laoghaire, classified according to bath and sanitary facilities, 1946.

	<i>Number of flats or tenements</i>	<i>% rented</i>	<i>% with one room only</i>	<i>% with fixed bath</i>	<i>% sharing sanitary facilities with other family or household</i>
Dublin County Borough	48,296	92	42	27.6	74.9
Dun Laoghaire Borough	3,131	85	16	60.4	45.3
Cork County Borough	5,677	95	31	12.6	90.5
Limerick County Borough	2,620	93	39	19	80.8
Waterford County Borough	862	90	33	16	81.4

Source: census data, 1946.

tutions to provide mortgage finance, and legal difficulties relating to conveyancing.<sup>55</sup> In 1974, a peak of 15 schemes was undertaken, four-fifths of them being built for sale; by then there was a total of 72 completed schemes in Dublin. The typical private purpose-built flat of the 1970s was in a block three storeys in height, with central heating and a balcony.<sup>56</sup> Most were advertised as ‘luxury apartments’ and were of generous proportions, similar in floor area to the average three-bedroom semi-detached house.

The growth in apartment development from the 1970s was linked to changing demand. The advantages of apartment living were increasingly recognised, particularly for those without children, and included security, convenience, lower energy costs and ease of maintenance. An image of luxury living was promoted. Many schemes were in mature residential environments and were infill developments located on the grounds of large old houses or on the sites of such residences which had been demolished. It was argued that the increased interest in apartments reflected the emergence of ‘a whole new class of people who want townhouse-style convenience living, coupled with the shortest possible road journeys’,<sup>57</sup> as well as the wish of property owners to maximise profits by achieving maximum density. The trend was certainly promoted by large investors such as insurance and pension companies. Such was the demand for the limited supply of purpose-built flats at the start of the 1970s that usually they were fully let before the block was completed.<sup>58</sup> By contrast, most private rental accommodation in multiple-occupancy took the form

<sup>55</sup> “‘Flats for sale’ a growth market’, *Irish Times*, 19 November 1971, 22.

<sup>56</sup> Examples in Dublin include Park Crescent House, Blackhorse Avenue; Eglinton Court and Eglinton Road. Two main apartment clusters emerged in the 1970s: along the Grand Canal between Leeson Street and Baggot Street, and near the south coast of Dublin Bay in Monkstown and Sandycove. In Galway, the first luxury apartments built for sale were Sancta Maria Apartments, St Mary’s Road (1977).

<sup>57</sup> Karl Jones, ‘More flats being built in Ireland: £2m. current investment’, *Irish Times*, 20 September 1971, 12.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Increasing demand for the unusual property’, *Irish Times*, 23 May 1970, A4.



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PL. III—Advertisement for Mespil Flats, from the *Irish Times*, 29 June 1954. Note that the purpose-built mansion flats at Earlsfort Mansions are also depicted here. Courtesy of the *Irish Times*.



of bed-sitters in houses converted prior to the introduction of new planning laws in 1964; these typically had limited facilities, including shared bathrooms.

The private apartment trend was further encouraged during the 1980s and 1990s through government legislation, but with very different outcomes. The Urban Renewal Act, 1986, targeted fourteen main towns and cities and provided grants to owner-occupiers to build or renovate housing in specified inner-city areas.<sup>59</sup> The designated areas became the focus of development, encouraged by a broad range of financial incentives applied in these areas under the Finance Act. Income tax relief was available to owner-occupiers for newly built or refurbished residential units, while investors could avail of tax relief for rented residential properties within specified size limits.<sup>60</sup> The introduction of tax-driven urban renewal schemes in designated areas of Dublin's inner city in the period June 1986–July 1994 led to a remarkable surge in apartment building.<sup>61</sup> With almost no private residential construction in the previous century, the capital's inner city was transformed in terms of built fabric, morphology and social geography, becoming home to large numbers of mostly young, single, professional people and students. The apartments, built to low specifications, sometimes without architects, were described as 'shoeboxes',<sup>62</sup> and were very different from the spacious homes offered by 1970s luxury schemes. Apartments erected in the urban-renewal areas were frequently seen as interim dwellings for young single people, rather than long-term homes, particularly given their generally small size; typically they took the form of cramped single-bed units with galley kitchens and no storage space, accessed from long corridors.<sup>63</sup> While government incentives led to a surge of apartment construction during the 1980s, they were built to service the needs of investors rather than residents (Tables 7 and 8).<sup>64</sup>

Though the last decade of the twentieth century witnessed a further surge in apartment construction to maximise land use during the housing boom, the level

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<sup>59</sup> The incentives included full remission of rates for ten years on new buildings, capital allowances for commercial development, a rent allowance against tax for tenants of new or refurbished premises, allowances for owner-occupiers of private dwellings erected or reconstructed during the scheme.

<sup>60</sup> Section 23 of the Finance Act, 1981 (renewed in the 1988 Act under Section 27), introduced a special tax allowance to encourage the construction of apartments for rent and, in the later act, small houses. Qualifying properties had to be rented out for a minimum of ten years. The specified size range was 30–90m<sup>2</sup> (323–968ft<sup>2</sup>) for apartments and 35–125m<sup>2</sup> (377–1345ft<sup>2</sup>) in the case of houses. The acts allowed the acquisition costs of properties or the costs of converting buildings into flats to be deducted from rental income from all sources until the limit of the tax allowance was reached.

<sup>61</sup> Jacinta Prunty, 'Residential urban renewal schemes, Dublin 1986–1994', *Irish Geography* 28(2) (1995), 131–49.

<sup>62</sup> Frank McDonald, 'How a shoebox king built a city-state', *Irish Times*, 23 October 2007, 14.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Howley, 'New residential neighbourhoods within the inner city: an examination of neighbouring', *Irish Geography* 42(1) (2009), 85–99.

<sup>64</sup> KPMG, Murray O'Laoire and NIERC, *Study on the urban renewal schemes* (Dublin, 1996).

TABLE 7—Housing completions generated in designated areas by the Urban Renewal Scheme, 1986–1995.

<i>City</i>	<i>Number of units built in each city</i>	<i>Number and % of units built in designated areas</i>
Dublin	24,018	5,350 (22%)
Cork	6,422	839 (13%)
Galway	5,635	553 (10%)
Limerick	3,930	661 (17%)
Waterford	2,484	200 (8%)
Total	42,489	7,603 (18%)

Source: KPMG, *Study on the Urban Renewal Schemes* (Dublin, 1996).

of multiple-occupancy in Ireland had remained low until then. At the time of the 1991 census,<sup>65</sup> the 580,695 permanent housing units in Ireland's urban areas (i.e. aggregate town area definition) included 526,023 conventional houses which were single dwellings, and 46,101 multiple-dwelling buildings, which was less than 8% of the total. The situation in Dublin was considerably different to that in the state's other urban areas, however. Almost one-fifth of permanent housing units in Dublin County Borough (the city centre) comprised multiple-dwellings rather than conventional dwellings. The more suburban areas of Dublin Belgard and Dublin Fingal, by contrast, had less than 1% of all permanent housing units in multiple-dwelling units. The 7.7% in Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown reflects the purpose-built luxury apartments constructed in the area from the 1970s. In the county boroughs of Cork, Limerick and Waterford, multiple-dwelling housing units accounted for between 3% and 7% of all dwellings in 1991, while the total for Galway was somewhat higher, at 11%.<sup>66</sup>

Overall, during the twentieth century a modest 6% of the total local-authority-built stock comprised flats (c. 15,000 flats).<sup>67</sup> Nearly 3,000 were on the Ballymun

TABLE 8—Tenure of residents of Urban Renewal Scheme subsidized dwellings, 1995.

<i>Location</i>	<i>Temple Bar</i>	<i>Dublin Docklands</i>	<i>Rest of Dublin</i>	<i>Rest of country</i>	<i>All areas</i>
Owner-occupier	58%	39%	51%	37%	40%
Tenant	42%	61%	49%	63%	60%

Source: KPMG, *Study on the Urban Renewal Schemes* (Dublin, 1996).

<sup>65</sup> CSO, *Census of population, 1991* (11 vols, Dublin, 1997), vol. 11, Table 19B, Private housing units, private households, persons and rooms by type of building, in the aggregate town area of each county and county borough, published February 1997.

<sup>66</sup> Number of multiple-dwellings: Cork County Borough: 2,329 (6.3%); Limerick County Borough: 687 (4.5%); Waterford County Borough: 401 (3.5%); 11,587 total; Galway County Borough: 1,566 (11%), calculated from 1991 Census data.

<sup>67</sup> John Blackwell, *A review of housing policy* (Dublin, 1988), 83.

estate.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, by the end of the twentieth century, local authorities across Ireland were demolishing or radically refurbishing the flat complexes which they had erected in the 1960s and 1970s. In Galway, the system-built Ragoon Flats were replaced in 1998, and former tenants were relocated to 276 new semi-detached houses at a cost of €15 million. In common with the approach now adopted by other local authorities, Galway Corporation worked with residents from the flats to ensure a smooth changeover, while the tenants were also involved in estate management with the local authority.<sup>69</sup> Another feature of this, and similar regeneration schemes, was the public-private partnership approach. Rather than concentrating the most marginalised groups in one area, as had previously been the practice, the focus now was on achieving a mix of local-authority housing, social and affordable homes, including some managed by voluntary agencies. Another 96 flats in the city at Walter Macken Place, Mervue, built in 1970 were refurbished.<sup>70</sup> In Cork, demolition and refurbishment of flat blocks at Blackpool and the Glen was also undertaken, with redevelopment providing family units, units for the elderly and a day centre.<sup>71</sup> The most celebrated regeneration project undertaken is at Ballymun, where the demolition of the 1960s towers is paving the way for construction of a new town capable of sustaining 30,000 people.<sup>72</sup>

## Modern homes from the 1960s

‘The typical Irish home, whether in the city or countryside, is a one or two storey, single or semi-detached cottage, usually with a small garden in the rear’.<sup>73</sup> Although published in 1965 these words could describe Irish housing in any decade of the twentieth century. The author’s argument was that the Irish population had ‘an obsession for the land’, which explained the preference for houses over flats, and for ownership over rental. Thus, the average family still wanted to live in a single house ‘with back garden’, which was the main type of housing erected both for private owners and local-authority tenants in 1965. The focus on the standard three-bedroom house resulted in shortages of homes for larger families and a particular inadequacy of facilities for one- and two-person families. Paul A. Pfretzschner pointed to the problem of providing for older people, as well as the need for improvements in the housing of the thousands of single adults who lived in bed-sitters and who required, in his view, modern apartment units. Interestingly, the 800-house Wates-built estate

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<sup>68</sup> The only large-scale high-rise housing estate in the country, Ballymun was a system-built scheme intended to maximise the number of units provided in the fastest time possible, in order to cater for a serious housing shortage. It was developed at a relatively low density of twenty dwellings per acre, providing accommodation for 16,000 people in seven sixteen-storey towers and eight-storey deck-access blocks.

<sup>69</sup> Con Power, ‘200 houses for Galway scheme’, *Irish Independent*, 6 February 1998, Property Digest, 41.

<sup>70</sup> Galway City Council, *Housing action plan 2004–2008* (Galway, 2004), see [www.galwaycity.ie/AllServices/Housing/Publications/FileEnglish,1966,en.pdf](http://www.galwaycity.ie/AllServices/Housing/Publications/FileEnglish,1966,en.pdf) (4 February 2011).

<sup>71</sup> Caroline O’Doherty and Neans McSweeney, ‘Fatima Mansions demolished’, *Examiner*, 20 August 2003.

<sup>72</sup> See Ballymun Regeneration Limited at [www.brl.ie](http://www.brl.ie) (4 February 2011).

<sup>73</sup> Paul A. Pfretzschner, *The dynamics of Irish housing* (Dublin, 1965), 112.

at Bayside, in Sutton in Dublin, beginning in 1972, was the first modern suburban housing estate to include two-bedroom houses. The company cited market research which demonstrated a substantial need for two-bedroom homes among newly married couples with no family and older couples whose children had left home.<sup>74</sup> It was already being argued in the 1960s that private enterprise in Ireland should follow the lead taken internationally in terms of imaginative design, layout and variety in housing form, including three-storey houses, maisonettes and high-rise apartment blocks.<sup>75</sup>

By the 1960s the housing standards set by the Department of Local Government required the provision of a separate bathroom and W.C., hot water facilities, proper insulation, lighting, ventilation and 'livability factors' including laundry and cooking facilities and adequate storage and shelving.<sup>76</sup> However, the insulation standards were minimal by modern standards, while the inadequacy of the electric wiring in many speculative houses built in the 1960s was notable.<sup>77</sup> There was a general lack of emphasis on construction standards in grant regulations in the late 1960s.<sup>78</sup> Whereas space standards tended to be generous, the minimal building standards facilitated the construction of poor-quality energy-inefficient homes, a problem which became more urgent with the advent of the energy crisis in the 1970s. For example, the 9-inch (23cm) hollow concrete block still in use for external walls in the 1960s was inadequate for the climate,<sup>79</sup> and even 11-inch (28cm) cavity walls required additional insulation, such as plasterboard dry-lining.<sup>80</sup> In the years before the first oil crisis some houses were constructed without chimneys and fire-places, as at part of Bayside.<sup>81</sup>

There were some variations on the typical speculative semi-detached house constructed and offered for sale during the 1960s. American-style open-plan layouts

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<sup>74</sup> While these houses were cheaper to purchase and maintain than conventional three- and four-bedroom homes, they enjoyed the benefits of their own garden with direct access from the ground-floor.

<sup>75</sup> For example, the *Irish Times* editorial on the 'housing gap', 1 September 1964, 7; 'Living high', *Irish Times*, 11 July 1967, 9.

<sup>76</sup> See Department of Local Government, *Housing and layout standards* (Dublin, 1964); P.J. Meghen, *No grants in future for unserviced houses* (Dublin, 1965).

<sup>77</sup> Houses built in Walkinstown in 1954, which featured both central heating and roof insulation, were well ahead of their time. 'Central heating, parquet floors-for £1,770', *Irish Times*, 15 February 1954, 3.

<sup>78</sup> James Pike, 'New developments in construction and materials', *Irish Times*, 21 June 1967, iv.

<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, even into the 1980s, a large proportion of housing was being built with 9 inch (23cm) concrete cavity-blocks as the main structural element.

<sup>80</sup> Pike, 'New developments in construction and materials', iv.

<sup>81</sup> The 'electric house' built without a fire-place and heated with electricity had already made an appearance in the 1930s (see, for example, 'The all-electric house has come to stay', *Irish Times*, 2 September 1936, 3). In the era of cheap energy in the 1960s and early 1970s many houses were built without chimneys, particularly in the larger urban areas. By the early 1980s the Department of the Environment was offering improvement grants of up to £600 towards the cost of building a chimney and installing a back-boiler in such homes (Paul Tansey, 'Let's add a room or two', *Irish Times*, 15 December 1981, A6).

began to appear,<sup>82</sup> while car-ports rather than garages were sometimes provided.<sup>83</sup> Innovations from the late 1960s included warm-air heating systems.<sup>84</sup> However, the greatest experimentation in layout, construction methods and materials took place in local-authority housing, with the advent of experimental prototype low-cost housing schemes. The final assault on Ireland's urban slums was under way. The Ballymun scheme was the most dramatic development of the decade, with its system-built towers and spine-blocks.

From the late 1960s onwards modified or rationalised traditional building was increasingly tried in low-cost housing schemes built for the National Building Agency. During this large local-authority housing drive, modern methods were used to construct low-cost, low-density, low-rise houses. The aim was to maximise production volumes, and the techniques used frequently involved cheap materials, breeze blocks, concrete, unconventional design and open-plan layouts, built to minimal standards in order to minimise costs and maximise the number of units completed. This included constructing houses with flat-roofs and without chimneys.<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately, problems frequently arose in the housing stock of these non-traditional large suburban estates, arising from poor or deficient finishing, heating, insulation and glazing.<sup>86</sup> Further physical problems related to the overall design of estates, including issues with security, the environment, the estate layout and common areas. Remedial works were required from the mid-1980s to address these problems.<sup>87</sup>

## Housing in the 1970s and 1980s

The 1970s saw a boom in both private and public house construction,<sup>88</sup> with the largest increase in the total housing stock in any decade since the turn of the century.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, by 1981, some 28.9% of urban housing and 22.5% of rural housing had been completed in the previous decade (see Table 9). Local-authority housing

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<sup>82</sup> A photograph of an open-plan kitchen-diner was featured in the *Irish Times* as early as 1954. 'New housing estate has modern features', *Irish Times*, 15 February 1954, 3.

<sup>83</sup> For example, Arnold Park, Killiney and Lucan, Co. Dublin.

<sup>84</sup> Examples include the Dublin Gas warm-air system of gas-fired hot-air space heating used at Dundrum Heights, at Grange Park, Baldoyle and Carrickbrack, Sutton, and the Husqvarna oil-fired warm-air system, which was installed at Bentley Park in Bray. Such systems are relatively inefficient, however, and most were later replaced with more conventional radiator-based central-heating systems.

<sup>85</sup> For example, Ragoon, Galway; 'no fines' housing for NBA at Finglas (first phase) and Tallaght.

<sup>86</sup> Power, *Hovels to high rise*, 355.

<sup>87</sup> Issues covered by the 1985 Remedial Works Programme included upgrading internal conditions (heating, kitchens and bathrooms); external works (windows, cladding and roofs); environment/security (access areas, land immediately adjacent to buildings); lifts; refuse disposal; staircases; entrances; balconies and other communal areas.

<sup>88</sup> Local-authority house construction expanded to a peak of almost 9,000 in 1975 before levelling off at about 6,000 in 1978–80. The output of private houses progressed from 9,201 in 1969 to 21,777 in 1980. Ian J. Irvine, *A study of new house prices in Ireland in the seventies* (Dublin, 1984).

<sup>89</sup> Power, *Hovels to high rise*, 341.

TABLE 9—Age of housing stock in aggregate urban and rural areas, 1981: number and percentage of housing units built in each period.

	<i>Pre-1919</i>	<i>1919–40</i>	<i>1941–60</i>	<i>1961–70</i>	<i>1971–75</i>	<i>1976–81</i>	<i>Total housing units*</i>
Aggregate town areas	93,687 (19.5%)	73,242 (15.2%)	93,148 (19.4%)	79,162 (16.5%)	75,493 (15.7%)	63,438 (13.2%)	480,719
Aggregate rural areas	152,904 (38.7%)	68,112 (17.2%)	49,495 (12.5%)	31,823 (8.1%)	40,221 (10.2%)	48,611 (12.3%)	395,097

Source: compiled from *Census of the population, 1981* (Dublin, 1986), vol. 8, tables 28b and 28c.

\* Totals include housing units where the year of construction was not stated.

provision peaked in the 1970s when some 57,000 units were completed, amounting to about a quarter of total housing output.<sup>90</sup> As a result, conditions improved, tenement dwellings finally became almost a thing of the past and overcrowding dropped dramatically. It is noteworthy that, by 1981, the housing stock in urban and suburban areas was significantly more recent than that in rural areas, with over 45% of urban homes having been constructed in the previous twenty years. During the 1970s house prices rose significantly,<sup>91</sup> with government concern over housing affordability prompting purchase incentives and subsidies. Moreover, houses were larger and better constructed at the end of the 1970s than at the beginning.<sup>92</sup> The average floor area increased from 1,106ft<sup>2</sup> (102.75m<sup>2</sup>) in 1970 to 1,214ft<sup>2</sup> (112.78m<sup>2</sup>) in 1979.

Physical improvements in design and finish included the increasing recourse to cavity-type walls, a rise in the amount of brickwork and stonework in the finish, and increasing use of roof insulation. Improved interior finishing in houses of the period<sup>93</sup> was attributed to the increased participation of women in the labour force; the combined effect of higher incomes among first-time-buyer couples with less time to work at finishing a new house themselves ensured that houses were better designed.

By the 1970s advertisements for new houses frequently boasted such features as built-in louvred wardrobes in some, if not all, bedrooms, and the occasional provision of extractor fans in kitchens. Fitted kitchens also began to make an appearance. Fitted carpets and curtains were sometimes included in the purchase price, or, in at least one instance, simply fitted curtain poles without the curtains. The now widespread interest in television was reflected in the provision of piped television

<sup>90</sup> Power, *Hovels to high rise*, 339.

<sup>91</sup> Over the period 1969–80, the price of an average new house rose from £4,625 to £27,538, an increase of 495%, which was significantly above the Consumer Price Index which rose by about 300%.

<sup>92</sup> Irvine, *A study of new house prices in Ireland in the seventies*, 9–13. Reasons cited include: higher incomes; an expanding population; the structure of state grants; the abolition of rates; structure of the development of building sites; housing market recession of 1974/5; cost of working capital; role of price controls and various incentives to purchase housing.

<sup>93</sup> Irvine, *A study of new house prices in Ireland in the seventies*, 10–11.



TABLE 10—Availability of central heating in private dwellings in permanent housing units, 1981–2002.

	% dwellings with central heating	% dwellings without central heating	% not stated
1981	39	58	3
1991	59	40	1
2002	84	13	2

Source: extracted from housing volumes of censuses, 1981, 1991, 2002. Totals may not add up to 100 in all cases due to rounding.

or a ‘master T.V. aerial’/‘communal T.V. mast’. In more expensive houses, central heating was becoming the norm (it was frequently available as an ‘optional extra’ in less expensive homes),<sup>94</sup> while at the top of the scale, double-glazing was occasionally offered. Other selling points included gardens which were rotavated and already seeded, sometimes including a fitted clothes-line, while the planning of estates with underground services (i.e. electricity cables) was becoming more common. Table 10 below demonstrates the trend towards the provision of central heating in dwellings in the period from 1981, when the question was first asked in the census, to 2002.

Housing-estate layouts in the 1960s and 1970s tended to be monotonous and grid-like, with a few notable exceptions. The new suburb of Bayside, Dublin, was unusual at the time in utilising a Radburn-type layout, grouping the houses in pairs or short terraces of between three and six houses, around lawned court-yards, with pedestrian ways passing around the courts and landscaped open spaces. Through traffic was minimised, and roads were deliberately curved in order to discourage both speeding and kerbside parking.<sup>95</sup> The design of the 800-house estate was so atypical that, although it was first planned in 1963, construction was delayed for several years due to protracted negotiations with the planning authorities.<sup>96</sup>

The experimental estate layout at Bayside notwithstanding, the predominant character of suburban development throughout Ireland has been monotonous, typically featuring straight, wide streets of standard dimensions, flanked by pavements of uniform width and low-density, low-rise detached, semi-detached or terraced houses with gardens. The standard low density was 8 to 10 houses per acre (20–5 per hectare) with a mandatory provision of 10% public open space. This almost invariably took the form of a single block of land, generally not landscaped. Regulations controlling housing densities; provision of open space/gardens; carriageway width;

<sup>94</sup> The percentage of new houses in estates with central heating increased from 57% to 93%.

<sup>95</sup> Other features at Bayside included the elimination of walls and hedges around individual gardens. Limited garden space in the majority of houses was balanced by a much larger than usual communal grass area. The courts and community areas were intended to enable children to play in safety, while the noise of traffic was greatly reduced. Where possible, telephone and electrical wires and cables were laid underground, while a covenant prevented house-owners from erecting individual TV aerials.

<sup>96</sup> ‘A house builder speaks his mind’, *Irish Times*, 21 June 1967, v.

provision of grass verges; building lines and so on have contributed to the uniformity. Nevertheless, the worst excesses of the rectilinear 1970s layouts gradually gave way to increased sophistication. By the early 1980s the use of small *culs-de-sac*, informal positioning of houses and varied colours of finish were being used on local-authority estates, creating a greater sense of intimacy and more human scale of development.<sup>97</sup>

Indeed, local authorities took the lead in providing imaginatively designed medium-to-high-density low-rise urban housing from the late 1970s onwards. The new inner-city houses such as those at City Quay, built at densities of 26 to 30 per acre (65 to 75 dwellings per hectare), can be described as medium-density low-rise schemes. They proved cheaper to construct than flats per person housed, and more popular with tenants.<sup>98</sup> The schemes (as at New Street/Clanbrassil Street, from 1978, and City Quay, from 1980) adopted attractive designs and employed conventional build methods using block and brick. City Quay consists of a mixture of terraced streets and *culs-de-sac* at a density of approximately 28 houses per acre, using two- and three-storey houses. Internally, standard house plans were creatively adapted to provide a wide range of dwelling types while maintaining an orderly external appearance. Traditional Dublin forms and materials were used such as brick walls and pitched roofs, and the design incorporated traditional Dublin elements including flights of steps, fan-lights over doors and vertical windows set in narrow facades. The City Quay scheme won the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland Silver Medal for Housing (1979–81). In the citation, reference was made to the ‘humane environment’ created by the architects; this had resulted in the scheme having become ‘an integral part of the community’ which was ‘greatly loved by its house-proud tenants’ and ‘a symbol of hope for the revitalization of Dublin’s inner city’ (Pl. IV).

## Increasing diversity and sprawl from the 1970s

The 1970s to the end of the century witnessed an increasing diversity in the form and location of housing on offer. A slight majority of the population now lived in urban or suburban, rather than rural, areas. With lengthening journey times to work from the suburbs, demand for more convenient housing increased, leading to a spate of private apartment construction, notably in Dublin. From the 1980s, infill development in the former grounds of historic villas, sports clubs and religious orders located in inner suburban areas typically took the form of small ‘town-houses’ and ‘duplex’ apartments. By the late 1980s gentrification was evident in older housing areas near the centres of Dublin, Cork and Limerick.<sup>99</sup> The spontaneous process of gentrification was supplemented by government and local urban renewal initiatives.<sup>100</sup> At the end

<sup>97</sup> See Andrew MacLaran, *Dublin: the shaping of a capital* (London, 1992), 199–200, for discussion of the development of the built environment at Killinarden, Tallaght.

<sup>98</sup> In October 1973 the minister for local government directed Dublin Corporation to revert to its earlier policy of higher-density low-rise housing for the inner city.

<sup>99</sup> Kevin Hourihan, ‘Population change in Irish cities, 1981–86: county boroughs, suburbs and daily urban systems’, *Irish Geography* 25(2) (1992), 160–8.

<sup>100</sup> The central city population of Dublin, for example, was 268,851 in 1926 and had fallen to 76,558 inhabitants by 1991. Between 1991 and 2002, Dublin’s inner-city population



PL. IV—City Quay housing scheme, Dublin. Courtesy of G. & T. Crampton Ltd Archive.

of the century, the housing boom sustained huge demand and increasing land values, which resulted in the increasing popularity of house construction on former corner garden sites—a new phase of infill. These were changes from the previous pattern of social segregation whereby private suburban developments on the outskirts of cities were physically removed from corporation estates, while the city centres had become dominated by the elderly and disadvantaged.<sup>101</sup>

Two complementary processes became evident in the structure of Ireland's urban housing in the latter half of the twentieth century. Firstly, Dublin's share of the Republic's population continued to grow; with acceleration in the city's expansion from the mid-1960s, by 1975 the population of the Greater Dublin area had reached 1 million, almost one-third of the entire population of the country. Secondly, the suburbanization of population resulted in a growing degree of sprawl around the major cities. Despite the gradual increase in apartment-building and infill development, the 1970s and 1980s saw population losses in the city centre areas of Dublin,

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increased by almost 28,000 people (36%), with over 80% of new residential developments comprising apartment dwellings. Howley, 'New residential neighbourhoods within the inner city', 85–99.

<sup>101</sup> Hourihan, 'Population change in Irish cities, 1981–86', 166.

Cork and Limerick, and a corresponding suburban expansion as a growing commuter zone extended into the hinterland.<sup>102</sup> The growing sprawl can be attributed to the failure of strategic planning, the policy of stimulating the construction industry by building new houses rather than refurbishing existing dwellings, and of facilitating private motorists at the expense of public transport.

The increasing dominance of private transport in Irish cities is both a cause and a consequence of their spatial form. It facilitates the expansion of low density suburbs and ex-urban developments. However, because of their form and location, these areas are very difficult and expensive to service by public transport, so even when residents prefer to use buses and trains, they are often inaccessible to them.<sup>103</sup>

Over the two decades from 1981 to 2002 the proportion of workers travelling over 10 miles to work increased significantly, with the greatest increase occurring in the proportion travelling 15 miles and over, which almost trebled during that time-period. Approximately 20% of workers now travel more than 15 miles to work, compared with just 8% in 1981 (Table 11).

Sprawl can also be linked indirectly to high rates of home-ownership which have reduced the mobility of the population.<sup>104</sup> Rather than occupying rental accommodation at the early and late stages of the life cycle, households tend to use the existing stock of housing very inefficiently. Thus, concentration upon new houses, at the expense of rental accommodation and maintenance of the existing stock, has brought about a pattern of urban sprawl. The consequences of sprawl have included high transportation costs, urban congestion and the creation of dormitory suburbs, with an associated loss of community.<sup>105</sup>

### Urban and suburban housing at the end of the twentieth century

A significant change had occurred in the nature, location, content and design of urban housing in the Republic of Ireland by the end of the twentieth century. As demonstrated by the 2002 census, the majority of the population was living in urban areas.<sup>106</sup> For the state as a whole, there were 784,789 households living in the aggregate town area, which included suburban areas.<sup>107</sup> This amounts to 61% of all

<sup>102</sup> The suburbs of Greater Dublin grew by 15.6% (over 49,000 people) between 1981 and 1986, while Cork's suburban increase of over 8,000 people represented a 24.7% growth, and Limerick's suburban increase was 4,700 or 30.3%. Hourihan, 'Population change in Irish cities, 1981–86', 162.

<sup>103</sup> Hourihan, 'Population change in Irish cities, 1981–86', 166.

<sup>104</sup> Irvine, *A study of new house prices in Ireland in the seventies*, 26.

<sup>105</sup> Mary P. Corcoran, Jane Gray and Michel Peillon, 'Local sentiment and sense of place in a new suburban community', in M. Breen, E. Conway and B. McMillan (eds), *Technology and transcendence* (Dublin, 2003), 146–59.

<sup>106</sup> CSO, *Census of population, 2002* (13 vols, Dublin, 2004), Vol. 13, Table 1, 11.

<sup>107</sup> The population in the aggregate town area is defined as those persons living in population clusters of 1,500 or more inhabitants. For this purpose, a town with a legally defined boundary is classified on the basis of its total population including any suburbs or environs.

TABLE 11—Commuting distances in the Republic of Ireland, 1981–2002.

<i>As percentages of total</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1986</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>2002</i>
0–4 miles	63.2	64.1	61.6	55.5	45.9
5–9 miles	20.2	19.6	20.0	21.3	21.5
10–14 miles	8.4	8.3	8.9	10.6	12.6
15 miles and over	8.1	8.0	9.5	12.6	20.1

Source: *Census of the population, 2002* (Dublin, 2004), vol. 9, table 5.

households. In Northern Ireland, there were a further 427,899 households living in urban areas in 2001, accounting for 68% of all households.<sup>108</sup>

Occupancy of urban housing in Ireland is still dominated by owner-occupation, at over 67%. When combined with houses being purchased from a local authority, that figure rises to almost 72% of all urban housing. Rental accounts for less than 20% of urban housing in the Republic of Ireland (Table 12).

Houses, rather than flats, are still the dominant form of housing. Indeed, at the end of the twentieth century, 85% of all urban/suburban residences comprised houses, of which the majority were semi-detached (just under 40% of all homes). By contrast, only 12% of the urban housing stock comprised flats or apartments (Fig. 3). Nevertheless, there had been a shift in the nature of flat dwellings over the course of the century, with most of the flats now located in purpose-built blocks, which accounted for 9% or 67,930 permanent housing units.

With respect to the 782,864 private dwellings in permanent housing units in urban areas, the 2002 data demonstrated that over 25% of all private dwellings had been built in the last decade of the century,<sup>109</sup> with a further construction peak evident in the 1970s, accounting for 19% of dwellings. Just 18% of all urban housing at the end of the century had been built prior to 1940 (Fig. 4).<sup>110</sup> Levels of comfort in the standard urban and suburban home improved significantly in the last quarter

<sup>108</sup> Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, *Northern Ireland census 2001: key statistics for settlements* (Belfast, 2005), Table KS20, available at [www.nisranew.nisra.gov.uk/census/Census2001Output/KeyStatistics/ks\\_settlements.html#settlement per cent20 per cent20tables](http://www.nisranew.nisra.gov.uk/census/Census2001Output/KeyStatistics/ks_settlements.html#settlement%20per%20tables) (4 February 2011).

<sup>109</sup> The boom in the Irish private housing market at the end of the twentieth century was directly related to significant economic growth since 1994 but also to changes in the availability of mortgage finance since 1993. Even before the end of that decade, however, questions were being raised as to the sustainability of such changes, with the recognition of increased vulnerability of many households to financial instability. Threshold Housing Debt Project/Daithi Downey, *Safe as houses? The nature, extent and experience of debt in the Irish housing system* (Dublin, 1997), 18.

<sup>110</sup> CSO, *Census of population 2002* (13 vols, Dublin, 2004), Vol. 13, Table 15, 35. Private dwellings in permanent housing units in the Aggregate Town and Aggregate Rural Areas of each Regional Authority Area, classified by period in which built.

TABLE 12—Nature of occupancy of permanent housing units in the aggregate town areas of the Republic of Ireland, 2002.

<i>Tenure type</i>	<i>Number of units</i>	<i>Percentage of units</i>
Owner-occupied with loan or mortgage	311,484	39.8
Owner-occupied without loan or mortgage	215,575	27.5
Being purchased from a local authority	32,901	4.2
Rented local authority	69,749	8.9
Private rented (unfurnished)	18,946	2.4
Private rented (furnished or part furnished)	98,730	12.6
Occupied free of rent	9,193	1.2
Not stated	26,286	3.4
Total	782,864	100.0

Source: *Census of the population, 2002* (Dublin, 2004), volume 13, table 18, 41.

of the twentieth century<sup>111</sup> as new homes were built to modern specifications. However, while individual homes were more comfortable, their location had become an increased focus of discussion, as urban sprawl and commuting times had emerged as recognizable problems by the end of the century.

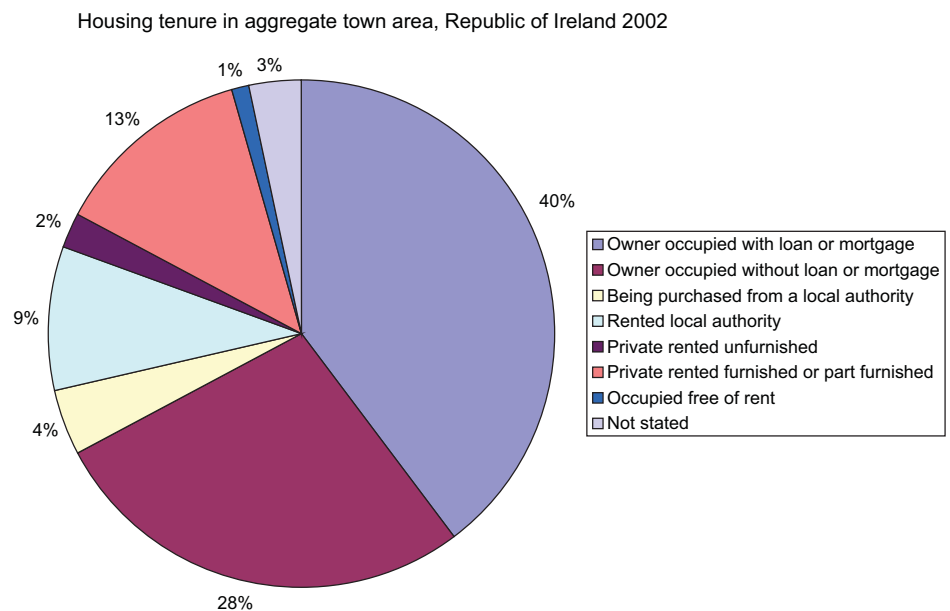


FIG. 3—Urban housing types in the Republic of Ireland, 2002.

<sup>111</sup> At the turn of the twenty-first century, an Irish national survey evaluated the overall quality of housing in the state, based on a survey of a representative sample of over 40,000 householders. Even in the decade since comparable data had been collected in 1991, there had been a substantial increase in the proportion of households with central heating, increasing from 59% to 90%. Dorothy Watson and James Williams, *Irish national survey of housing quality, 2001–2* (Dublin, 2003).



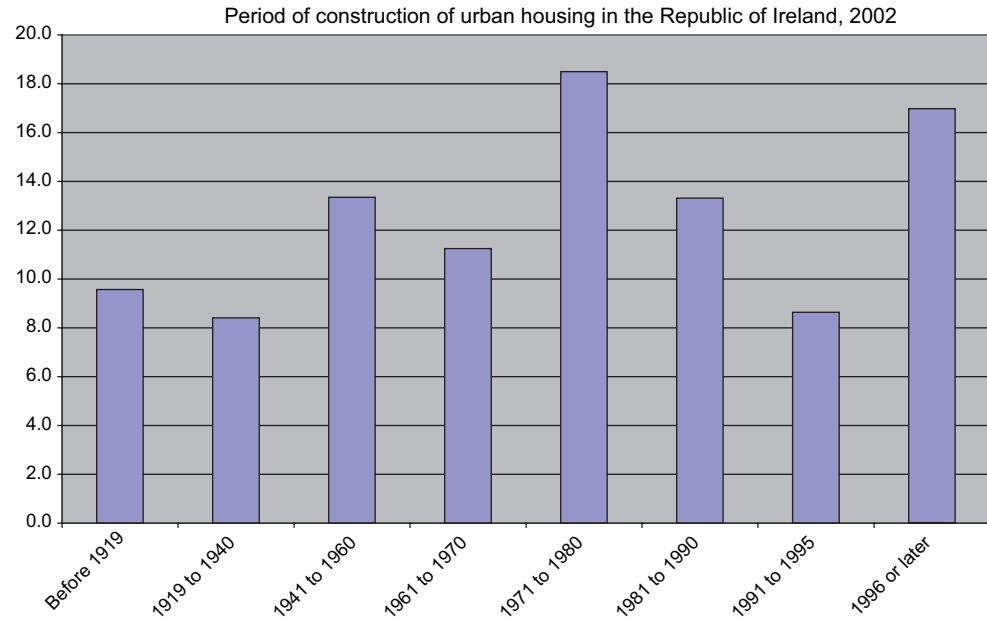


FIG. 4—Period of construction of urban housing in the Republic of Ireland, 2002.

## Conclusion

It is evident that Ireland's urban-housing pattern in the twentieth century has been shaped to a large degree by the legislative framework which has incentivised owner-occupation<sup>112</sup> and driven particular standards through the availability of grants. This tendency is vividly seen in the experience of the last two decades of the century, when property-based tax incentives were employed by government in order to encourage urban renewal.

Tenure changed significantly during the course of the century, with owner-occupation becoming the dominant form.<sup>113</sup> Successive government policies since the formation of the state in 1922 have encouraged home-ownership as the preferred form of tenure for its citizens. High levels of home-ownership have been generally presented in a positive light, as enhancing social stability and a sense of responsibility.<sup>114</sup> The provision of generous subsidies to home-ownership (e.g. income-tax relief on mortgage-interest payments, grants to first-time buyers of new houses, waiving of stamp duty on purchase of new homes, exemption of homes from capital-gains tax), the sale of local-authority housing to sitting tenants at discounted prices, and the neglect of private renting in housing policy, have been important in their impact on social housing. Renting has been treated as a second-best option both by the state and by its citizens. This has had a significant impact on

<sup>112</sup> A detailed discussion of this point is provided by R.A. Somerville, 'Housing tenure in Ireland', *Economic and Social Review* 38(1) (2007), 107–34.

<sup>113</sup> In suburban Co. Dublin, owner-occupation exceeded 78% in 1981 (see MacLaran, *Dublin*, 187).

<sup>114</sup> Fahey and Watson, *An analysis of social housing need*, 20.

the social-housing sector, with local-authority rented housing being used for much of the century as a stepping-stone to owner-occupation. While one-third of Ireland's housing stock in 1993 was built by local authorities, over two-thirds of it had been sold to occupants.<sup>115</sup>

In housing terms, Ireland's urban population is considerably more fortunate at the end of the twentieth century than it was at the beginning. The vast majority of the population now live in comfortable, well-appointed homes where overcrowding and its associated illnesses are a distant memory. In this sense, at least, the century was one of progress.

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<sup>115</sup> In Dublin in 1989 alone, 2,373 houses were purchased from the city's local authorities compared to the development of just 80 dwellings in the whole of the city by the public sector. See MacLaran, *Dublin*, 192.